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ABSTRACT

An evaluation was conducted of the Atlanta Public Schools Sunclasses program, which was designed to reinforce basic reading and mathematics skills of retained or administratively placed students in grades 1-4, through 10 instructional television programs aired during a 6-week period in the summer of 1984. Supplementary activities implemented to increase viewership and to assist parents in providing positive summer learning experiences for students included mailing of postcard messages to target students, Phon-a-thon computer phone messages suggesting a variety of activities, parent activity packets distributed through the schools, and inclusion of information on the program in a school information telephone service. Three indices were used to assess program viewership: a personal telephone survey, computer phone survey, and a school-based survey. Results indicated that students were viewing the classes; the parent activity packets were successful in providing parents with useful learning activities; and the procedures for disseminating the packets should be reviewed. The computer Phon-a-thon messages were not successful, with about 75% of the parents indicating that they had not received the messages. (LMM)

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1984 SUMMER INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION EVALUATION

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1984 SUMMER INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION EVALUATION

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1984 SUMMER INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION EVALUATION

The summer of 1984 was the third consecutive year in which the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) sponsored summer instructional television programs designd to reinforce basic reading and mathematics skills. The summer television programs (termed Sunclasses) were broadcast over a six-week period (i.e., June 18, 1984, to July 27, 1984) on WPBA, Channel 30. The Sunclasses were targeted for retained or administratively placed students in grades 1 through 4. However, unlike previous years, numerous supplementary activities were implemented to increase viewership and to assist parents in providing positive summer learning experiences for students. The objective of the evaluation was to determine public reaction to the Sunclasses and to provide a formative assessment of the supplementary activities used to facilitate viewership.

In contrast to previous years, all of the instructional broadcast were commercially produced. A listing of these programs appears below:

Grade Level	Area	Television Series
1	Math	Two Plus You
1	Reading	I Can Read . . . I Want to Read
2	Math	Math Mission 2
2	Reading	Readalong 1
3	Math	Math Country
3	Reading	Readalong 2
4	Math	Math Factory
4	Reading	Readalong 3

Additional instructional programs televised included the following:

Grade Level	Area	Television Series
1-7	Recreational Reading	Reading Rainbow
2-3	Reading	Electric Company
3-8	Reading	Color Sounds

Since a preliminary report was disseminated previously (10/2/84), the following report will present new findings, as well as summarize findings previously reported. Each program component will be discussed separately where possible.

Sunclasses '84

Parent Telephone Survey (Phase I)

Two parent surveys were conducted. One was a telephone survey conducted in conjunction with Georgia State University (GSU); the other was a written questionnaire sent home at the beginning of the 1984-85 school year. The telephone survey was conducted in two phases. Phase I (July 2-9) occurred during the third week of the broadcast. Phase II (July 30 - August 10) occurred at the end of the summer series. The

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purpose of the telephone survey was to obtain more reliable information, since the data were collected while the Sunclasses were still being aired and parents were contacted directly.

Completed surveys were obtained for 221 randomly selected parents during Phase I of the telephone survey. Each parent/guardian in the sample had a child who was either retained or administratively placed at the end of the 1983-84 school year. The sample of parents was divided into three subgroups:

(1) Those who said their children were watching the Sunclasses and who consented to a follow-up phone call.

(2) Those who said their children were not watching the Sunclasses, but who, nevertheless, consented to a follow-up phone call.

(3) Those whose children may or may not have been watching the Sunclasses, but who did not consent to a follow-up phone call.

A summary of the findings for the total sample obtained during Phase I appears below: (Note: All percentages for a given item will not necessarily be reported.)

- Of the 221 parents interviewed by phone during Phase I, 73 percent indicated that their children were viewing the Sunclasses. Ten percent indicated that their children were not watching the Sunclasses, while the remaining 18 percent did not know whether their children were viewing the shows or not.

- About half of the parents (48 percent) indicated that they too had watched some of the shows; however, an equal number of parents (48 percent) stated that they had not had a chance to view any of the Sunclasses.

- A majority of the parents (66 percent) had received the parent activity packets. However, only 14 percent of the parents stated that they had received the computer telephone (i.e., Phon-a-thon) messages.

- About half of the parents (48 percent) indicated that they had both received the parent packets and used some of the suggested activities. Thirteen percent had received the packets, but had not used the suggested activities, while 11 percent stated that they had not received the packets.

- A majority of the parents (68 percent) indicated that they liked the APS summer activities for elementary students.

Interesting data were also obtained by making comparisons among the three subgroups of parents interviewed during Phase I (see Table 1). Parents who indicated that their children were viewing the Sunclasses gave a considerably higher percentage of positive responses to almost all questions, when compared to other parents interviewed. The only exception was parents' responses regarding the computer telephone messages. Although computer phone messages were made weekly to the homes of all retained or administratively placed students with phones (i.e., based on the student master file), only a small percentage of parents indicated that they had received the computer phone messages, regardless of whether their children were viewers or non-viewers. The percentage of positive responses to this item ranged from 9 to 16 percent for the three subgroups.

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TABLE I

PHASE I TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS FOR
RANDOMLY SELECTED PARENTS BY
PERCENT OF POSITIVE RESPONSES

Category	Consenting to Follow-Up: Viewers *(N = 144)	Consenting to Follow-Up: Non-Viewers (N = 11)	No Follow-Up (N = 66)	Total (N = 221)
Child viewing shows	100	—	24	73
Parent viewing some shows	67	—	14	48
Received parent activity packets	86	27	27	66
Received taped telephone messages	16	9	12	14
**Tried suggested activities	63	—	21	48
Liked APS summer activities for elementary students	88	18	33	68

*Note: Percentages reflect the response of parents who indicated that they had received the packets and tried the activities.
**N = number of parents surveyed.

Parent Telephone Survey (Phase II)

As noted previously, parents of both Sunclass viewers and non-viewers were contacted again at the end of the six-week summer broadcast. The purpose of the follow-up phone interviews was to determine whether there had been any change in students' viewing patterns by the end of the Sunclass series. Interviewers were successful in contacting 83 percent of the parents who had indicated in Phase I that their children were viewing the Sunclasses and who also agreed to participate in the follow-up phone survey. Ten of the 11 parents in the sample who had indicated that their children were not viewing the Sunclasses, but who, nevertheless, consented to participate in the follow-up study were also contacted. Since there was a large discrepancy between the number of viewers and the number of non-viewers included in the follow-up sample (there were 120 viewers and 10 non-viewers), caution must be taken in drawing any comparisons between these two groups.

A summary of the telephone survey conducted during Phase II follows:

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Follow-up of Sunclass Viewers:

- Of the 120 parents of initial viewers contacted during Phase II (July 30 -August 10), 89 percent indicated that their children continued to view the Sunclasses.

- When asked how frequently students viewed the Sunclasses, 30 percent stated that their children viewed the Sunclasses four times per week or more; 38 percent indicated their children viewed one to three times per week, while 28 percent did not know how often their children viewed the programs.

- When asked once again about their reaction to the computer telephone messages, 75 percent of the parents of Sunclass viewers stated that they had not received the computer phone messages. However, for those parents who did receive the messages, 22 percent of the parents stated that the messages were helpful, while 2 percent stated that the messages were not helpful.

- When asked about the usefulness of the parent activity packets, 67 percent of the parents stated that the activities were helpful; 2 percent said they were not helpful while 8 percent indicated that they had not received the packets.

- When asked whether additional assistance was needed in using the activity packets, few parents of Sunclass viewers (16 percent) felt that additional assistance was necessary to use the packets effectively.

- Math was the most preferred aspect of the Sunclasses. Thirty (30) percent of the viewers' parents gave this response.

- When asked about features of the Sunclasses which parents or students disliked, 28 percent of the parents mentioned various dislikes, such as the shows were too repetitive; there were too many shows; the shows were somewhat boring, etc. However, 35 percent of this same sample of parents said that they had no dislikes regarding the Sunclasses.

Follow-up of Sunclass Non-Viewers:

- As previously mentioned, ten of the 11 parents in this group were contacted at the end of the Sunclass series. Seven of the ten parents indicated that their children were still not viewing the summer broadcast.

- When asked why students were not viewing the Sunclasses, several parents indicated that the students were out-of-town for the summer. In one instance, problems with the home television set prevented viewing.

Computer Telephone Survey

A computer telephone survey was also conducted to assess Sunclass viewership. The procedure used to transmit the Phon-a-thon (i.e., computer phone) messages was modified slightly so that each person answering the phone would not only listen to a taped message, but also respond to the question of whether or not children were viewing the Sunclasses.

A random Phon-a-thon tape containing 400 phone members was used as the sample. A tape was made of the responses given by the person answering the phone. All data were collected on July 17, 1984.

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A total of 106 valid responses were obtained by this method. Sixty-four (64) percent of those responding indicated that target students were viewing the programs. However, some caution should be taken in interpreting these data since there is no way to determine who gave the responses.

School-Based Parent Follow-Up Study

As in past years, parent follow-up surveys were sent home by local schools at the beginning of the new school year. Parents of retained or administratively placed students were asked to respond to various aspects of the summer program and return the surveys to the school. A total of 375 school-based surveys were received systemwide.

A summary of the findings for the school-based survey appears below:

- A majority of the parents (56 percent) who returned surveys to the school indicated that their children had viewed the Sunclasses.
- Forty-seven (47) percent responded that the Sunclasses were helpful, while 52 percent indicated that the activity packets were helpful.
- Twenty-six (26) percent of the parents indicated that they had received the taped phone messages, while 17 percent indicated that they used the activities suggested on the telephone messages.
- Thirty-seven (37) percent responded that their children had participated in other summer activities. Interestingly, participating in reading and mathematics activities at home was the most frequently given response. Thirty-six (36) percent of the 140 responses given fell into this category.

Table 2 provides a comparison of all three survey methods: APS/GSU phone survey (Phases I and II), computer phone survey, and school-based survey. Together, they represent 702 responses. All three surveys indicate that the Sunclasses were viewed by a majority of those responding. The two parent surveys (i.e., the APS/GSU phone survey and the school-based survey) reveal that the parent activity packets were also used by about half or more of those responding. However, only a few parents received the computer phone messages.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF TELEPHONE AND SCHOOL-BASED SURVEY RESULTS BY PERCENT

Item	Computer Survey (N = 106)	School-Based Survey (N = 375)	Phone Survey (Phase I) Viewers (N = 144)	Phone Survey (Phase I) Total Phone (N = 221)
Child viewing Sunclasses	64	56	100	73
Parent Activity Packets (Activities helpful/used)	N/A	52	63	48
Computer Telephone Messages Received	N/A	26	16	14

N/A = Not applicable

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Parent Activity Packets

A packet of suggested summer learning activities was developed for grades 1 through 4 by the Division of Instructional Planning and Development (DIPD). The packets were to be disseminated by the schools during the spring orientation session. To evaluate the packets, items were included on the parent telephone surveys (i.e., Phases I and II), and the school-based parent survey disseminated at the beginning of the 1984-85 school year.

As mentioned previously, the results of the APS/GSU phone survey and the school-based survey indicated that the parent packets were helpful to about half of the parents who responded. Parents of Sunclass viewers, however, gave a higher percentage of positive responses to having received and used the packets than other parents surveyed (see Table 2).

Highlights of the findings regarding the parent activity packets are summarized below:

- A majority (66 percent) of the 221 parents contacted by personal phone interviews during Phase I indicated that they had received the parent activity packets. However this finding is greatly influenced by the parents of Sunclass viewers.

- About half of the parents interviewed in Phase I (48 percent) stated that they had received the packets and used the activities suggested.

- Most of the parents of Phase I viewers (86 percent) stated that they had received the packets, while 63 percent indicated that they had both received the packets and used the activities.

- A majority (67 percent) of the 120 parents in the follow-up phone survey (Phase II) stated that the activities in the packets were helpful. However, only 16 percent expressed a need for further assistance.

- A majority of the 375 parents who responded to the school-based survey (52 percent) also indicated that the activities in the packets were helpful.

In addition to the packets distributed by the local schools, DIPD distributed 497 packets to 54 parents and seven day care centers during the summer. Table 3 includes a listing of the day care centers receiving packets.

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF PARENT ACTIVITY PACKETS TO LOCAL DAY CARE CENTERS

Center	No. of Packets
Atlanta Recreation Department	10
Cascade United Methodist Church	70
Cathedral of Faith Church	60
Christian City	25
Druid Hills Church of Christ	4
Grady Homes Day Care	124
Perry Homes Day Care	150
Total	443

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Phon-a-thon

As previously reported, weekly taped phone messages were conveyed to target parents using computerized telephone equipment. The messages were made by prominent persons in the community who suggested a variety of summer learning activities. One message was transmitted per week for a nine-week period (June 19, 1984, through August 24, 1984). A computer record was maintained of all calls completed. A completed call was one in which someone in the target household picked up the telephone receiver. However, it was not possible to determine who answered the phone or whether they listened to the taped message.

Although approximately 11,000 calls were transmitted during the summer, only a small percentage of the 596 parents surveyed indicated that they had received the messages, as mentioned previously (see Tables 1 and 2). These data should raise some concern regarding the effectiveness of this component.

Postcard Messages

Three postcard messages were sent to target students during the summer to inform them about the Sunclasses and computer phone messages. The CARE Line number was also provided if parents needed assistance. The mailings were especially designed for target students with no phones or with incorrect phone numbers on record. The first and third mailings were sent to all target students; the second mailing was sent only to students with no telephones.

A record was maintained of the postcards mailed, as well as cards returned due to incorrect addresses. After making adjustments for returned cards, 3,146 postcards were sent to target students on June 20, 1984; 1,032 postcards were mailed on June 27, and 3,160 postcards were mailed on August 1. However, it is difficult to determine their impact.

CARE Line

The CARE Line was used to assist parents in making maximum use of the Sunclasses and related summer activities. The CARE Line number was included in both the postcard and computer phone messages. The CARE Line staff maintained a record of all calls received.

The CARE Line received 30 phone calls regarding the Sunclasses and related activities during the months of June and July. Calls regarding the Sunclasses represented 19 percent of the CARE Line calls received during this period. When compared to other subject areas, the Sunclasses ranked as the third most frequently requested area for these two months. The exact ranking is as follows:

Area	Percent of Calls Received
Mathematics	48
Language Arts	21
Sunclasses	19
Social Science	10
Science	1

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Thus, the CARE Line was obviously used as a resource even though only 16 percent of the parents of Phase II viewers indicated that they needed assistance, and only 26 percent of the parents responding to the school-based survey indicated that the CARE Line was helpful.

Parent Commitment Forms

Parent agreements were obtained during the spring orientation session held at the local schools. Signed commitment forms represented an agreement by the parent and student to participate in the Sunclasses.

A system record was maintained of the parent commitment forms submitted to the area offices. There were 1,807 parent commitment forms received at the end of the 1983-84 school year. The forms were submitted by 82 percent of the elementary schools and reflected a 57 percent response rate for all retained and administratively placed students.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Three indices were used to assess viewership of the **Sunclasses** (i.e., personal telephone survey, computer phone survey, and school-based survey). In each instance, a majority of those responding indicated that students were viewing the Sunclasses.

2. The **parent activity packets** seemed to have been successful in providing parents with useful learning activities. A majority of the parents indicated that they had received the packets and at least half indicated that they had tried the activities and considered them to be helpful. However, the procedures for disseminating the packets should perhaps be reviewed. A third to a half of the parents indicated that they had not received the packets even though they were distributed by the local school.

3. The **phon-a-thon** (computer phone) messages were not successful. About 75 percent or more of the parents indicated that they had not received the messages, even though approximately 11,000 calls were completed.

4. The Sunclasses represented 19 percent of the inquiries received by the **CARE Line** during June and July and ranked as the third most frequently requested area. However, most of the parents surveyed did not appear to make use of this resource.

5. It's difficult to assess the effectiveness of the **postcard messages.** Since few cards were returned, it is possible to conclude that they reached their destination. However, data were not available to determine whether the cards had any impact upon target parents and students.

6. **Parent commitment forms** were once again collected. However, the usefulness of this activity in encouraging viewership of the Sunclasses may need to be reviewed.

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